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ABSTRACT

An examination of the portrayal of women in popular magazine advertising from 1942 to 1945 suggests that the mass media played a major role in calling women out of the home and into the factory and machine shop to assist in the war effort. Discouraged from working during the Depression years when jobs were scarce, in the 1940s women were eagerly invited to join the labor force to help mobilize for global war. With "Rosie the Riveter" as their national heroine, wartime magazines proclaimed women's capability to perform almost every kind of theretofore "male" task. With the closing of war industries and the return of job-hungry soldiers, however, the magazines began to tell women to go home. In the late 1940s, popular magazines featured aproned housewives once again content in a completely domestic role. (Author/MKM)

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RIVETING FOR VICTORY: WOMEN IN MAGAZINE ADS IN WORLD WAR II

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Introduction

Most social historians have noted the extraordinary increase in the 1930's of hostility against working women. Often accused of depriving family men from needed jobs, these women actually were most represented in such typically non-male occupations as clerical work. In any case, despite equal-pay rules written into the National Recovery Administration industry codes set up in 1933, such laws were not enforced. At the end of the 1930's, prospects for improving women's economic status appeared bleak indeed. The Great Depression had fostered a wave of reaction against any change in women's traditional role. Historian William Chafe reports that legislatures enacted laws restricting the employment of married women, and that labor, government, and the mass media all joined in a campaign urging females to refrain from taking jobs.[1]

In the 1930's, fashion reflected the current norms of traditional femininity. "Bosoms and waists reappeared, and partly to stimulate the textile industry, skirts dropped below the knee."[2] If they thought beyond the immediate economic concerns of that decade of hardship, the women of the 1930's perhaps wondered what had happened to the ideal of equality proclaimed by the flippant flapper.

All such hostility toward working women vanished with the outbreak of World War II. The exigencies of mobilizing for global war warranted a clear,unambiguous invitation to women to take jobs outside the home.[3] The 1930's trickle of working women mushroomed during the war years to include at least

eight million new female war workers, many serving as crane operators, riveters, tractor operators, and truck drivers. In heavy industry alone, the number of women workers increased from 340,000 to more than 2 million during the war years.[4] And when all the single women were hired, employers recruited married women and mothers. Suddenly, women were welcome in law and medical schools, and in the armed forces.[5] Looking back to World War I (when the wartime service of American women was prodigious), the United States Department of Labor reported that "it can hardly be said that any occupation is absolutely unsuitable for the employment of women."[6]

As in World War I, equal-pay laws were written into defense contracts. But now they were enforced, and their impact felt beyond the military sphere. For example, when telephone operators were threatened with lower wages, Senator Wayne Morse said he saw no reason why girls should subsidize the cost of service to subscribers by taking lower pay.[7] Protective legislation was suspended to allow women to work longer hours, and more than 2.5 million women received training for skilled jobs.[8] Women's changing status was indicated, also, by the authorization at last of nurses to be regular commissioned officers, eligible for all the wartime benefits of men. No longer did they serve outside the official military structure as they had in World War I.[9]

Initially, employers had been reluctant to hire women to participate in government training programs for defense work. Once Pearl Harbor was attacked in December of 1941,

however, the way was cleared for a massive expansion of the female labor force.[10] Chafe states that women responded to the manpower (sic) crisis with

> an unprecedented display of skill and ingenuity... The beautician who overnight became a switchman (sic) for 600 Long Island Railroad trains represented but one example of women's readiness to assume new responsibilities. 11

Most importantly, though, public attitudes began to change. Instead of frowning on women who worked, now government and the mass media embarked on an all-out effort to encourage women to take jobs. Even the close-knit Washington press corps opened its ranks. On Capitol Hill the number of women journalists tripled during the war years from thirty to ninety-eight.[12]

Social historians are just beginning to acknowledge the significant role of magazines in calling women to war:

> None of the changes in women's work could have occurred without the active approval and encouragement of the principal instruments of public opinion. While necessity required the employment of millions of new female workers, the mass media cooperated by praising women who went to war. 13

With Rosie the Riveter as their national heroine, such magazines as McCall's, Ladies' Home Journal, and Look proclaimed the ability of women to perform almost every kind of heretofore "male" task. Both Life and Look featured female "combat pilots" on their covers.

The editor of Ladies' Home Journal praised women for meeting the task of masculine strength and endurance while

sociologists asserted that "there are very few jobs performed by men that women cannot do with changed conditions and methods."[14] The wartime propaganda of such magazines was effective, reaching into the very hearts of American homes to harness women's talents. Never before had women been so assured by so many articles and advertisements, of their capabilities.

This positive tone of the wartime magazines is striking when played against a consideration of the 1930's restrictive attitudes. Against postwar magazines' portrayals of women (especially in advertisements), the difference is remarkable indeed. The patriotic journalists who had lured Rosie into riveting for victory now pictured her yearning for a cozy cottage, a kitchen apron, and a baby.[15] With the closing of war industries and the return of job-hungry GI's, women were told to go home, whether they wanted to or not. Just two months after the end of World War II, 800,000 women had been fired by aircraft companies.[16] Throughout American history, a return to domesticity has predictably and understandably followed the end of war. In this case, however, perhaps the legacy of insecurity from both World War I and the Great Depression combined to encourage an unusually ubiquitous retreat to the support and stability of the family, after 1945.[17]

By the 1950's, the nation saw an unprecedented return to family life. Women were marrying at younger ages, and bearing

more children than they had in many decades.[18] In celebration of the rising marriage and birth rates, brides and babies blossomed all over the advertising copy of the late 1940's and throughout the decade of the 1950's, which has been termed the "Era of Togetherness."[19] The popular magazines showed aproned housewives competing with each other for the whitest wash on the block, pans that were twice as clean as one's neighbors', and the healthiest kids in the suburbs.[20] Women who so recently had been praised for their ability to handle the most challenging wartime tasks, were now told a completely different tale. Magazines now advised women that they had never been so well off, so happy as in their present state of domesticity, and kept printing figures proving it didn't pay a wife to work.[21]

Perhaps nowhere else in recent history has advertising contributed so greatly to the drastic alteration of women's consciousnesses and lifestyles. An alternative viewpoint, of course, is that these printed exhortations to return to the home were only articulating an already widespread American conviction. However, the many women who opposed the return to non-employment refute this; indeed, surveys conducted toward the end of the war demonstrated that 75 to 90 per cent of female workers hoped to remain in their jobs after the end of the war.[22]

Looking at the Sources

Following is a survey and discussion of the sources themselves: Life (leading general-audience, pictorial magazine); Business Week (leading financial magazine, directed to a conservative male audience); and Ladies' Home Journal (leading, "traditional" women's

magazine) for the World War II years. (Some discussion will also follow,on the period directly following the end of that conflict.) Looking primarily at advertisements, I will further develop the ideas I have outlined.

LIFE MAGAZINE: As the general-audience, pictorial magazine in this study, Life is most likely to have mirrored the times--which it does. With the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, the United States found itself suddenly at war. By March of 1942, Life was running at least ten ads in every issue that portrayed women in military roles. Often these were not ads sponsored by any government agency, rather by private companies extolling their own products as they tried to inspire women into the wartime labor force. The March 16, 1942 issue carried a typical full-page announcement: A woman in snappy military dress leans on the side of a car, swinging a wrench. "I understand a lot of things since I joined the motor corps!" she asserts in bold-face print splattered across the upper part of the page. "A few months ago I couldn't tell a carburetor from a cotter pin. Today I can take the motor apart and put it together again!" An appropriate reference was made so that readers understood the merits of Servel Electrolux gas refrigerators by the end of the copy.

A June 15, 1942 ad depicted a woman in military dress under the heading, "She Knows what Freedom Really Means." This ad, which praised "Mrs. America" for "stepping out to victory" by the donation of her "youthful energy" to the war effort, was widely featured during this period in other magazines such as Look and McCall's.

With the escalation of the war in 1943, the ads became much more direct. Life's August 2, 1943 issue ran a series of photos of

young women riveting and performing other heavy industry tasks, as part of a life insurance ad. "Last Saturday was the proudest day of my life," began the copy. "The day my Bill went off to war, he held me tight as he kissed me good-bye and he said, 'So long little Allie--you're going to be the head of our family now!' I think of him every day when I take my place in the shop," continued the beaming young wife operating the lathe in the photo, "and all of my work so far has passed inspection with flying colors."

An August 2, 1943 ad displayed a rosy-cheeked young woman capably doing another wartime task: "It's her job to check surface finishes...She is one of the many inspectors who made sure that vital parts of that precision engine you flew were finished down to millioniths of an inch," the ad read.

Life featured a woman steelworker on its cover in the August 9, 1943 issue. Inside, the accompanying article stated that the cover girl and her co-workers "have proved that in time of crisis no job is too tough for American women." From the "soft-sell" cover of January 1942 with its smiling nurse and caption,"Wanted: 50,000 (war) Nurses," this was a step indeed.

In the same issue, Norge Household Appliances published a "salute" typical in tone to that of many other manufacturers'. In grey-green-blue watercolors, the drawing depicted a military-uniformed woman standing dreamily against a brick building. Beyond her, the city she guards is shrouded in night fog. The ad reads:

> Vigilance and resolution in the face of peril have characterized American women since early pioneer days. But now, instead of scanning field and forest

> for bands of marauding savages, our women's eyes sweep the skies for still more savage foes. To learn what is required of them in Civilian Defense, they have studied long and diligently. In every sense of the word they are truly representative of American womanhood.

BUSINESS WEEK continued the general trend of positive portrayals of women. Perhaps because of its financial orientation, this magazine seems to have published even more war-directed advertisements, slanted especially for women (often indirectly, through appeals to the assumed male audience).

The July 10, 1943 issue featured a bandannaed, trousered female factory worker toting her lunch pail under the heading, "Pop's mighty proud of the little lady!" The copy began:

> Not long ago, many men would have raised the roof at the thought of their wives getting war jobs. They looked on it as an affront to their own earning ability... or a lowering of social prestige. That's not true today.

The ad told patriotic men to be proud of their patriotic women.

The August 14, 1943 issue displayed a full-page ad featuring a yellow-ribboned, rouged-and-lipsticked lathe machine operator. "Geraldine Maurer doesn't look like a very belligerent person," the ad acknowledged, "but her husband has just gone into the Army and she likes to call the machine she operates at one of the Timken Roller Bearing Plants 'her Jap-killing machine.' Perhaps that is one reason why her daily production is running 20% above average."

The September 25, 1943 issue of the business weekly carried the first of many government-sponsored ads that frankly recruited women for war-time jobs. With accompanying photos of women performing various hotel tasks, this ad encouraged women to step in to fill these necessary civilian jobs. "'Woman power,' says Uncle Sam, 'can save the day!'"

The Santa Fe Railroad Company featured a full-page color photograph of female workers in the September 1943 issue with the bold caption, "Women at Work for a Railroad at War." "America needs millions of women to take over war jobs--to stay with those jobs--to help speed the day when our fighting men will return victorious!" stated this appeal, using the very common ploy of direct reference to fighting husbands, brothers, and sweethearts. Like all of the ads, the models in this one were very attractive, with hair perfectly in place and face freshly made-up--the norm even when its owner is flying a combat plane. The overall impression is one of female strength and purposefulness, with no sacrifice of the amenities of vanity. "Right now thousands of Santa Fe women are doing vital work to 'keep 'em rolling,'" the railroad ad continued, with its photo gallery of capped beauties greasing engines, wielding shovels, cleaning roller bearings, laboring in sheet metal and blacksmith shops. "They take pride in their work, too!"

Readers of the October 30, 1943 issue could not miss the full-length color photo of a smiling brunette operating a fork life under the headline, "Doris Delivers the Goods":

> Twenty-year-old Doris Peoples is doing a man-sized war job--and getting a tremendous thrill out of it. She pilots a powerful gasoline-driven lift truck through the machine-crowded shop of the big Timken Roller Bearing Factory, hauling loads of from two to three tons...

Many variations were used to recruit the women of American for wartime work. To press the possibly diffident middle-aged lady into service, one 1943 ad ran a photo of a fortyish, aproned

housewife bearing the tag, "Loaned by John J. Jones and family." "Good for you, Mrs. Jones...and good for all your family!" the ad sang the praises of the older woman now venturing into what was perhaps the first paid work of her lifetime. "You're good Americans."

LADIES' HOME JOURNAL also did its part to recruit women for the war effort. An ad for shoes in the May, 1942 issue proclaimed, "In service or home: Lady! You're doing a man-sized job!...Take a bow, Mrs. America--and the cheers of your grateful country. You've gone to work that men may fight..."

The July, 1943 issue showed a helmeted female combat pilot on the cover of the magazine. In the same issue, Selby Arch Preserver Shoes ran a full-page ad in which a woman glowed, "I've Learned the Secret of Holding Down Two Jobs!...It keeps me hopping--holding a full-time job at the airplane factory, and keeping my family well-fed and cheerful besides." Also in this issue, a female factory worker sprang down the page singing "Give Me a Shredded Ralston Breakfast...I've got a job to do!" A small girl, also in factory garb, strode along saying, "Same here, Sis!"

Paralleling the escalation of the war, a somewhat more intense September 1943 full-pager announced, "She, too, is making history!" next to the photo of a woman busy beating eggs in her kitchen. "Not just in overalls or a uniform--but even more in an apron--the American woman is serving her country today as never before!", concluded this ad for Chef Boy-Ar-Dee macaroni.

The October 1943 issue showed still more uniformed lovelies

under the heading most calculated to arrest the reader of women's magazines: "These Engaged Girls are all War Workers!" The ad continued,

> You are needed too! Women and girls must take their places!...Any job that frees a man is a war job... find yours today!

The ad concluded with conspicuous photos of women munitions plant workers, fabric tensile strength testers, Bendix altimeter testers, and finally: a plug for Ponds' Cold Cream.

Drano's tactics were more overt: under a photo series depicting women bus and taxi drivers, laundry workers, teachers (October 1943) it announced: "These are War Jobs, too--and you're needed!" Plain and simple, in one of the period's frankest pitches, Drano assured women, "Impossible for an inexperienced woman to really accomplish anything? Nonsense! Hundreds of thousands of women are. You can, too!"

Throughout the year 1943, cover-girl-turned-flight-officer Gay Gahagan reappeared in Camel cigarette ads as a worthy model for American women.

Under a photo of a busy female executive talking on the phone in her penthouse office (October, 1943), a Selby Arch Preserver Shoes ad proclaimed

> It's a Woman's World! Hats off to the 'weaker sex.' Because they're keeping things humming on the Home Front, millions of men are released to shoulder guns on the fighting front! It's a big, tough job...

That same month, Scotch Tape praised two female riveters and their co-workers, all smiling, sporting bandannas, and striped shirts. "Hitler forgot about THESE GIRLS!" the ad began.

> Millions of American women have answered Hitler's challenge by changing from sewing circles to swing shifts...Their courage and efficiency is evidenced by the fact that today

> only 56 our of every 1900 war jobs are listed as 'unsuitable for women.'

The back cover of the October 1943 issue was dominated by a uniformed-and-goggled WAF lighting up a Chesterfield. "Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron," the ad stated, "Theirs is the man-sized job of ferrying warplanes from factories to air bases for Uncle Sam. Expert flyers, each and every one--THEY ARE THE BEST."

In November of 1943 Chrysler Corporation ran a large photo of women auto plant workers. A blackboard in the foreground read, "Alice has gone to school again." The ad continued:

> Yes, Alice and thousands of other girls and women have been prepared by Chrysler Corp. training schools to perform valuable war-production tasks. Girls and women from all walks of life...Some are just out of high school. Some are wives and mothers...Some even are grandmothers. Many of them have never worked before.

Conclusion

Life's December 10, 1945 cover featured party dresses, reflecting the return to polite social formalities after five years of battle. An ad in this issue showed a male in military uniform smiling at the lettered greeting, "Welcome Home, Joe. You're favorite pie's a-baking. Your dog is foolish with joy. The girl next door is prettier than when you left..."

The girl next door was being fired from her wartime job, however, to make room for the returning hero. Journalism historian Marion Marzolf notes that it seemed to take more determination in the postwar years, for women to keep their hard news beats or even to convince their editors that women could do those jobs,

for the wartime lesson that women could do anything had contained an unspoken but powerful disclaimer--"in an emergency."[23] During World War II Dorothy Jurney was "acting city editor" for the Washington News; but afterward, she was informed she could not be considered for that position permanently on account of her sex.[24]

Meanwhile, the cover of Ladies' Home Journal's July 1945 issue showed two women joyfully hugging a returning soldier. Inside the magazine, Alice Hamilton, President of the National Consumers' League, wrote about "Why I am Against the Equal Rights Amendment." Soap ads abounded--Cashmere Bouquet, Palmolive, Ivory--all urging women to use their products to prepare for the return of their sweethearts. Many of the models in the ads were either dressed in wedding gowns, or else described as engaged. Reiteration of "She's engaged! She's lovely! She uses Ponds'!" was supposed to imply a causal connection.

How far the tide had turned was indicated by a December 1945 ad in the Journal which featured a veteran kissing a blonde, her red-nailed fingers caressing his face. The accompanying text:

> 'MARRY ME NOW,' YOU SAID. You were home again, my dear love. So we were married. 'Now these darling hands are mine,' you said. I'm thankful my hands were smooth for our wedding--thankful I've always used Jergens Lotion.

By the late 1940's, Journal led the magazines with its many ads full of smiling babies and women in wedding gowns. "I can't get rid of tell-tale gray!" a woman lamented to her neighbor over a backyard fence in a Fels-Naptha soap ad (May 1949). "Satina in my starch makes my ironing three times faster," confided another

housewife. The multitude of such ads, concerned only with the pursuit of softer skin, success at cooking and other domestic tasks, and a cleaner wash, belied the active, ground-breaking roles women had enjoyed only a short time ago during the war. Rosie the Riveter had married and moved to the suburbs, never to be heard from again--certainly not in the pages of Business Week, which simply stopped its positive wartime portrayal of working women..

And yet, neither the hardships of the 1930's nor the mobilization of the economy for the war of the 1940's had truly altered women's old position as advertising pawns. Throughout the war, in fact, Ponds' had continued to proclaim that soft hands won fiances, while both sleek hair and romance, said Woodbury's, could be bought in one of their bottles. The only difference in these ads in the war years was that the woman in the Ponds' ad announced her engagement while working at a wartime lathe and the Woodbury girl's romantic hero was in uniform.[25]

Indeed, advertisers had long ago decided to influence women directly, for their own purposes. When frenzied consumer buying (often on the installment plan) in the 1920's ended with the stock market crash and the Great Depression, women were chastised for their wastefulness and commanded to restrain their materialism. And Eleanor Roosevelt recited a message of frugality in Ladies' Home Journal, whose editors pleaded with women to ration and conserve as their patriotic World War II duty.

With this background of historical advertising manipulation, who could expect that postwar advertising would continue to portray women as brave and bold? For that would serve but little

purpose in a time when a return to domesticity, for many reasons both economic and sentimental, was the dominant pattern.

At the close of World War II, the economic climate changed again. Now women were invited to indulge in an extravagant shopping spree. They were primed for the revival of consuming even before the end of the war, as ads for U.S. war bonds showed young women dreaming of the shiny new kitchens they could finance with their savings at the end of the war.[26] There were no more ads urging women to enter the public sphere, to be vigorous and versatile participants in industry. Throughout the decade of the 1950's, the ads' pitch made a 180-degree turn. By 1963, Betty Friedan and others were sufficiently outraged to launch a far-reaching protest,[27] but that is another story.

It is impossible to determine to what degree magazines mirror, or influence, the popular culture. Do they serve chiefly to repeat ideas that are already widely accepted? In any case, a study of popular magazines' portrayal of women--especially in advertising--in the wartime and immediate postwar period of the 1940's provides an illuminating view of some popular attitudes and ideas. Broader-based content analysis of the magazines of the 1940's will no doubt reinforce the conclusion of this preliminary study, that the popular magazines, especially through advertising, more than fulfilled their patriotic "duty" to induce women to rivet for victory.

FOOTNOTES

[1] See William Chafe, The American Woman (Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970)(New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

[2] Caroline Bird, Born Female (The High Cost of Keeping Women Down)(New York: Van Rees Press, 1968), pp. 39-40.

[3] Mary P. Ryan, Womanhood in America (From Colonial Times to the Present)(New York: New Viewpoints (Franklin Watts, Inc.), 1975), p. 316.

[4] Ryan, Womanhood in America, p. 317.

[5] Bird, Born Female, p. 40.

[6] Bird, Born Female, p. 40.

[7] Bird, Born Female, p. 40.

[8] Joan Ellen Trey, "Women in the War Economy," (The Review of Radical Political Economies, July, 1972), pp. 40-57.

[9] Bonnie and Vern L. Bullough, The Subordinate Sex (A History of Attitudes Toward Women) (Urbana, Illinois: The University of Illinois Press, 1973), pp. 333-334.

[10] Chafe, The American Woman, p. 137.

[11] Chafe, The American Woman, p. 137.

[12] Chafe, The American Woman, pp. 141-142.

[13] Chafe, The American Woman, p. 146.

[14] Dorothy Thompson, "Women and the Coming World,"(Ladies' Home Journal, October 1943), p. 6.

[15] Bird, Born Female, p. 42.

[16] Ryan, Womanhood in America, p. 318.

[17] Not that the newly working women unanimously adopted this idea; as victory approached, more and more women "found reasons why they should keep on working" (Bird, Born Female, p. 42); and Congresswoman Helen G. Douglas led the fight for a Federal Equal Pay Act in 1945 and again in 1948.

[18] Bird, Born Female, p. 42.

[19] Ryan, Womanhood in America, p. 298.

[20] Ryan, Womanhood in America, p. 298.

[21] Bird, Born Female, p. 43.

[22] Ryan, Womanhood in America, p. 318.

[23] Marion Marzolf, Up from the Footnote (A History of Women Journalists) (New York: Hastings House, 1977), p. 75.

[24] Marzolf, Up from the Footnote, p. 75.

[25] Ryan, Womanhood in America, p. 298.

[26] Ryan, Womanhood in America, p. 301.

[27] See Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: Norton and Company, 1963); Marya Mannes, But Will It Sell? (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1964); also, Alice Embree, "Media Images I: Madison Avenue Brainwashing--The Facts," in Sisterhood is Powerful, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970); and Lucy Komisar, "The Image of Women in Advertising," in Woman in Sexist Society, eds. Vivian Gornick, Barbara Moran (New York: New American Library, 1972).

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